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ABSTRACT

The booklet describes the origins and operations of the Weslaco (Texas) Training and Development Center, a center for severely retarded and handicapped students (ages 10-22). The facility simulates normal living and working conditions and focuses on household management skills (grocery list and meal preparation, clothing care, household repairs), self care skills (grooming, health, and safety), prevocational skills (simple contract words and math for budget management), and social and athletic skills. Community experiences are incorporated into the program. Listed are implementation and financial requirements, along with a contact person and typical academic schedule. (CL)

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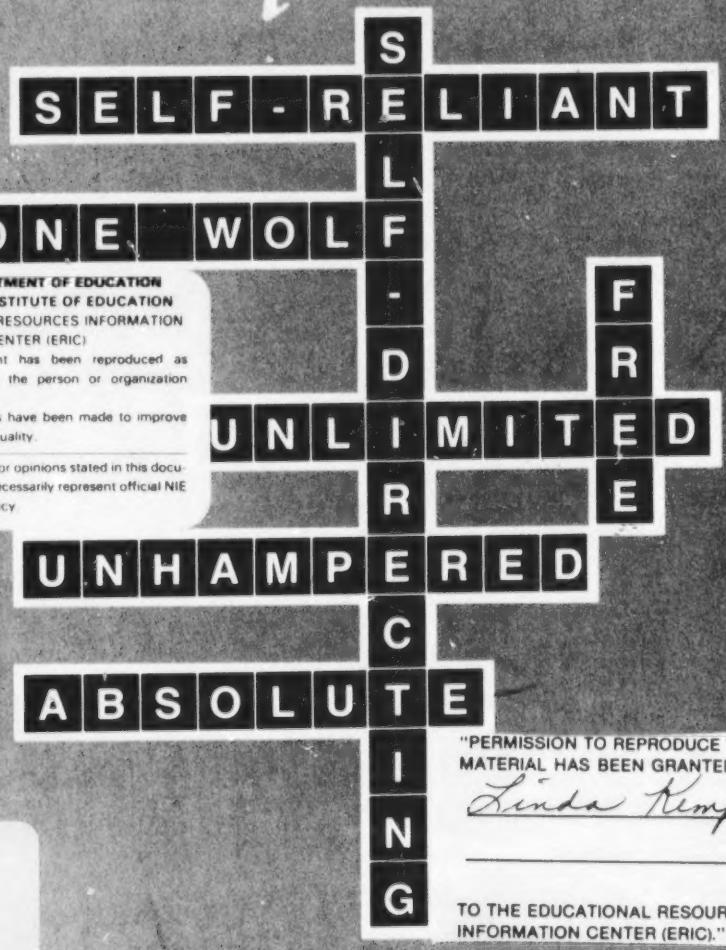
A Chance for Independence



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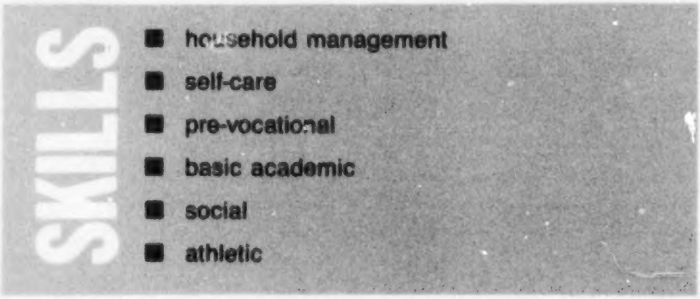
Texas Education Agency

Weslaco Training and Development Center

A special education program that teaches skills for independent living.



An exemplary program selected for the Demonstration Programs for School Improvement (DPSI) Network by Texas Education Agency

Target Students

Trainable mentally retarded students, ages 10-22.

Description

A number of years ago, the city of Weslaco found itself with a highly select group of students who did not fit into the structure of Weslaco ISD. These students weren't functioning at a level high enough for the high school special education classroom. But they *were* capable of acquiring skills, completing tasks, and progressing through a program that would enable them to live more independently. Thus, the beginning of the Weslaco Training and Development Center, a facility with a homelike environment that helps severely retarded and handicapped students confidently fit into the real world.

The T&D Center simulates normal living and working conditions. Rooms in the specially designed facility look much like those in any home . . . a cozy living room furnished with a couch and rocking chair . . . a spacious kitchen and handy laundry room. There's also an academic classroom, and special areas set aside for students to paint and fire ceramics and shape wood shop projects. Nearby, a greenhouse contains seed cuttings of various plants, and garden vegetables provide the ingredients for snacks and meals.

Students of the center with varying levels of independence are grouped together. To ensure standard performance, teacher trainers are provided specific criteria that students must meet to accomplish each task. Following instruction, modeling, and practice, students acquire household management skills (preparing grocery lists and meals, clothing care, household repairs), self-care skills (grooming, health, and safety), prevocational skills (simple contract words and math needed for budget management), and social and athletic skills.

The program extends into the community, providing an opportunity for students to practice newly acquired skills. Students buy groceries, bank paychecks, sell ceramic and woodshop items, and invite guests to attend special occasions at the center. They also run errands to school offices and participate in student assemblies.

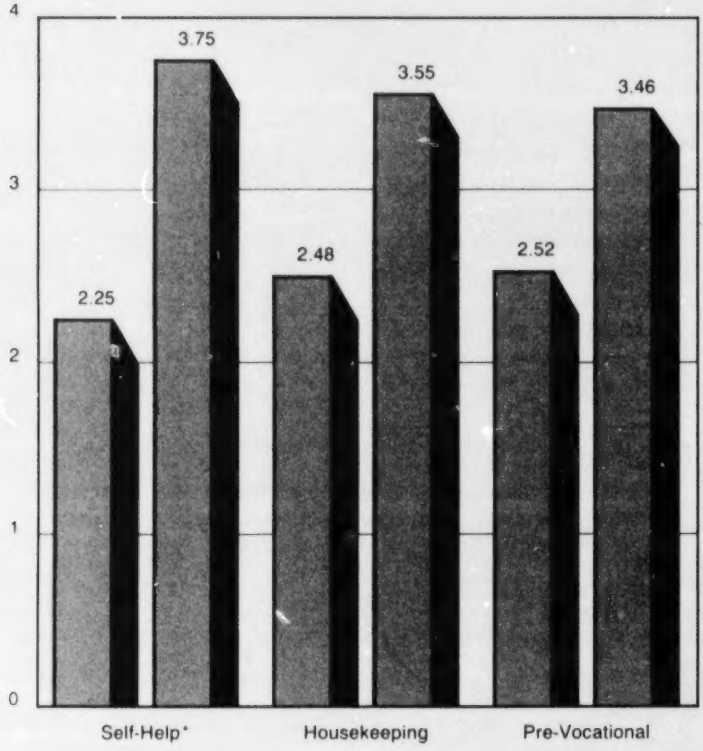
Graduates of the program return home to their parents able to lead more self-sufficient lives and equipped with work skills for eventual placement in an area sheltered workshop.

Evidence of Effectiveness

Students of the T&D Center demonstrate significant gains in independent living skills when rated on a project-developed scale (becoming independent) based on behavioral observations. Students were rated objectively in several areas on a five-point scale with demonstrated inter-rater reliability. All gains were statistically significant and were sustained over the period measured.

Training and Development Center Student Gains in 1983-84

(mean rating gains in selected areas)



*Self-Help: Grooming, Mealtime, Clothing Care, Bedmaking

Implementation Requirements

A minimum level of replication requires:

(1) A certified special education teacher and instructional aide for every 10 students

(2) A needs assessment to determine the type of services students will require

(3) A basic academic curriculum and one project to start, based on findings of the needs assessment

(4) Appropriate facilities, equipment, and materials

(5) Supervision by a special education coordinator or equivalent to monitor classroom instruction and evaluation, develop curriculum, coordinate with other special education classes and outside agencies, and schedule inservice sessions

(6) Regular assessment of student achievement, which is used to adjust the curriculum and teaching strategies.

Financial Requirements

Weslaco ISD has maintained the T&D Center at $44,750 per year with a cost per pupil of $3,200. The cost includes salaries for two teachers and an aide, plus expenses for a volunteer from the Foster Grandparent Program. Although the scope of the curriculum and number of projects have expanded through the years, continuation costs have remained steady as projects have become self-supporting.

Services

Visitors are provided an orientation session consisting of a slide-tape presentation and comprehensive tour of the T&D Center. The curriculum guide and supplemental materials are available at cost. Project staff will provide assistance in facility design, staff training, program development and evaluation.

Contact

Blanca Munoz, Special Education Director
Weslaco Independent School District
P.O. Box 266
Weslaco, TX 78596
(512) 968-1515 ext. 749

Academic Schedule

8-8:30 a.m.

- Arrival, breakfast, grooming, job assignments

8:30-9:30 a.m.

- Groups 1 and 2: Curriculum includes English, mathematics, social studies, health, and science
- Groups 3 and 4: Projects include homemaking, gardening, and carpentry

9:30-10:30 a.m.

- Alternate groups

10:30-11:30 a.m.

- Adaptive physical education in junior high gymnasium

11:45 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

- Lunch in school cafeteria

12:15-1 p.m.

- Leisure time (teacher-guided until students are able to manage their time independently)

1-2 p.m.

- Group 1: Projects include arts and crafts
- Group 2: Pre-vocational training (sorting, assembling, filing done on contract for local firm)

2-3 p.m.

- Alternate groups

2:30-3 p.m.

- Fridays: Outing to community bank and businesses

The National Diffusion Network (NDN)*

A nationwide system of some 400 successful programs. Two new Texas programs added to the network are:

- **Weslaco ISD**
  Individualized Reading/Language Arts Instructional and Staff Development Process (minority and bilingual students, grades 1-3)

  Approved May 1983
  Contact: Richard Wubbena (512) 968-1515

- **Houston ISD**
  Informal Science Study (grades 5-12)

  Approved March 1984
  Contact: Howard Jones (713) 749-1692

The Demonstration Programs For School Improvement Network (DPSI)*

A statewide system of programs with outstanding achievement scores that includes:

- **Brownsville ISD**
  El Arco Iris: A Bilingual Prekindergarten Instructional Television Project

  Approved December 1984
  Contact: Leonel Rosales (512) 546-2433

- **Weslaco ISD**
  Weslaco Training and Development Center (trainable mentally retarded students, ages 10-22)

  Approved June 1984
  Contact: Blanca Munoz (512) 968-1515, ext. 749

- **Austin ISD**
  Chapter 1 Prekindergarten

  Approved July 1983
  Contact: Anita Uphaus (512) 451-8411, ext. 204

Promoting the transfer of successful educational programs to schools that wish to improve their programs and services.

Do You Have A Successful School Program?

If your district has a program that you consider a strong candidate for the Demonstration Programs for School Improvement (DPSI) Network, please contact the Division of Program Evaluation at (512) 475-4448. Applicants will be provided assistance in evaluation design and collection of test data.

For more information about the
Demonstration Programs for School Improvement Network
and the
National Diffusion Network
contact the
Divison of Special Programs
(512) 475-5656
Texas Education Agency

Texas Education Agency
201 East 11th Street
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